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# The Christian News-Letter

*Edited by*
KATHLEEN
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**NEWS-LETTER**

LAYMEN IN THE CHURCH
THE CHURCH AND WAR

**SUPPLEMENT**

"IN THIS FAITH WE LIVE"
A COMMENT BY
CHRISTOPHER HOLLIS

THIS ISSUE of the News-Letter will be in the hands of most of our readers on the eve of the Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam. Eleven years, filled with tremendous happenings, have elapsed since the last international gatherings of representatives of the Churches took place at Oxford and Edinburgh in 1937. No one, not even those most directly concerned with the preparations for the meeting, can form any clear picture of what the proceedings of the Assembly will be like or what will be its outcome. We hope to give a report of the meeting in four weeks' time. This News-Letter, which I am writing to enable the Editor to take a richly deserved holiday, deals with two matters which will engage the attention of the Assembly.

## THE PLACE OF LAYMEN IN THE CHURCH

Among the various committees and sub-committees which will be at work during the Assembly, there will be two parallel and co-operating groups on the place of laymen in the Church. In view of the pioneer work of the Christian Frontier in this field, the Editor of the Christian News-Letter has been asked to be chairman of one of these groups.

Since the entire adult population of the world, apart from a few hundreds of thousands of priests, clergy and ministers, consists of lay men and women, we have to define precisely what we are talking about when we speak of laymen and the

Church. In particular, we have to distinguish clearly two major questions, which are often confused.

The first is the participation of lay men and women in the specific tasks of the Church. Both on general grounds, and in view of the present shortage of clergy, there is obvious need for the re-enforcement of the evangelistic and pastoral activities of the Church through lay service. One of the difficult practical problems here for the individual layman is the distribution of his time. He may have to choose between service of his own parish or congregation as church-warden, Sunday School teacher, youth leader and so forth, and service of the denomination as a whole through member-ship of central committees. Fresh demands are being made on him to-day for service on inter-denominational bodies. All these activities, moreover, compete in respect of time with the second type of lay service, of which we are about to speak.

This second form of service lies, not in the direct further-ance of the institutional activities of the Church, but in Christian witness and action in the secular calling of the individual and in the public life of society. Up to the present it has been too commonly confused with, and subordinated both in thought and practice to, the first. It may be one of the tasks of the Amsterdam Assembly to rescue it from this relative neglect and give it the place which it deserves in the outlook of the Church.

In many different quarters, and along different lines of approach, it is coming to be seen with increasing clearness that the action of the Christian laity in the fulfilment of their public responsibilities is the focal point in the relation of the Church to society. If the Christian faith is something to be *lived*, it must be a force continually permeating the decisions and actions that make up the life of society. In action in society it is laymen who, from the nature of the case, are in the vast majority of instances the spearhead: it is they, and not the clergy, who make the critical decisions. The importance of this truth has never yet been given adequate recognition in the organization of the life of the Church. But behind the practical and common-sense

recognition that Christian action in society can be effective only if it takes place at the point where actual decisions are made, it is coming increasingly to be seen that there lies a more fundamental theological problem. We need a new orientation of our thinking about the nature of the Church itself. The Church is not, as many have come to think of it, a sphere of life *separate* from society. Christianity is a force entering into the whole human struggle and progressively changing it. It is not something outside the natural and social life of man, but that life itself, in so far as it has been redeemed and made anew. In this perpetual Christian transformation of the social life of men, those who have to make practical decisions at all levels in everyday affairs are the spearhead of change.

### THE CHURCH, THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

Another question which, though it is not dealt with in the reports of any of the preparatory commissions, the Assembly will not be able to evade, is the Christian attitude to war. A letter on the subject has been addressed, with the consent of the headquarters of the World Council, to all the delegates to Amsterdam, by a group of Christians belonging to fifteen different countries. The initiative was taken by a group of Church leaders in America. The signatories to the letter from Great Britain are well-known advocates of the pacifist position, like Dr. George MacLeod and Professor C. E. Raven, to whom is added the fresh name of Professor D. M. MacKinnon.

The signatories believe that a re-study and a further definition of the Christian attitude to war should be undertaken by the Assembly at Amsterdam and submit a statement for consideration and adoption by the Assembly. The conclusions to which the statement leads up are, briefly, that the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Incarnation of the Holy Spirit, cannot ever be at war, since the unrestrained violence of modern war is utterly inconsistent with its nature and task; that it follows from the nature and function of the Church that its members should not participate in war; and that the Church should call upon peoples and governments, unitedly or singly, to cease from war and

from preparations for war and to adopt peaceful procedures for the settlement of conflict and overcoming of tyranny and aggression.

The address to the delegates to Amsterdam is not an impressive document. It contains many loose and unconvincing statements. A more powerful case could be made for what the memorialists have in view than is actually presented. But it would be the gravest mistake for the Churches to ignore the strength and depth of Christian feeling which lies behind this approach. New forces are stirring in the life of the Church, and the Assembly must have a sensitive ear for the heart-searchings which have been awakened by the coming of the atomic age.

Modern warfare has come to differ from the warfare of the past not only in degree but in kind. It is not that wholesale slaughter and destruction were unknown in wars of the past; they were only too frequent. But they were not inherent in the conduct of war, and it was possible to create a tradition of limited aims and of respect for the lives and property of those not directly involved in fighting. In modern warfare indiscriminate massacre and unsparing devastation have become the nature of war itself.

The soldiers see more clearly what is at stake than many churchmen. Major-General Fuller, one of the most distinguished of living students of war, has written a book on *The Second World War*. In this he brands the policy of obliteration bombing and the use of the atomic bomb against Japan as at once a mistake in military strategy and the height of political folly. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki he stigmatizes as "a type of warfare that would have disgraced Tamerlane". Those who waged war in earlier days looked on it as an instrument of policy, and did not allow themselves to lose sight of the peace that was to follow victory. They knew that cities, not rubble heaps, were the foundation of civilization. In total war rational human aims are sacrificed to the all devouring demonry of war.

It is alarming evidence of the extent to which the Christian conscience has become dulled that there should be such wide indifference to the moral issue involved in indis-

criminate massacre. That humane considerations have not ceased to be a factor in public life is shown by the wave of feeling in this country in favour of the abolition of the death penalty. How then can we tolerate in our thought acts which blot out in a moment the entire life of a great city? Have we put from us for ever the vision which came to men more than two and a half millenia ago of a God who had "pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle"? Without some intense and powerful revulsion of man's whole being against the inhumanity and insanity of modern war, there can be little hope of the survival of human civilization. About that we cannot have the slightest doubt.

It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the discussion of traditional moral theology about the "just war" in the Anglican Report on *The Church and the Atom* should seem to sensitive minds to have little relation to the awful realities of the present. "The moral and political unrealism of the 'Church and the Atom' report," writes Dr. John Robinson in a letter to *Theology*,[1] "is really frightening. . . . A war may be fought for justice, but in any relevant circumstances it cannot be an act of justice. The question, therefore, is not: Can an atomic war be just? but, Can it ever be justified, can the frightful evils of such an act ever be less than those of its alternative?

"To state it thus at least delivers us from the appalling moral abdication of having as Christians to hold with the committee (1) that warfare is perfectly just (and Christian?) which obeys the rules and only slaughters combatants in a 'clean' way; and (2) that atomic warfare breaks all the rules, but by the convenient 'doctrine of necessity' can be blessed for use in any way most efficacious in any state of 'present imminent danger'. It is precisely such casuistry by which naked expediency is dressed up to justify what is admitted to be wrong which has discredited traditional moral theology in the eyes of the ordinary man. He may not be equal to many subtleties, but he knows hypocrisy when he sees it."

[1] July, 1948.

Or take in, further illustration of what is stirring in the minds of some younger Christians, the following passage from an article in *Réforme* by Professor Ellul, a young professor of law in France. He says :

" There is no longer conscientious objection. I do not wish to re-open debate on this subject, but only to draw attention to a fact which is not without import. There are no longer traces of protesting tendencies against the Moloch of the State, which manufactures in increasing volume the instruments of death. The problem is especially serious for the Churches to-day, in which there is to be seen nothing but very vague desires for peace, and at the best, solemn declarations which are perfectly useless.

" What disturbs me is that the so-called theological position is in reality nothing more than a justification of the obligations imposed by the State, that is to say, of a conformity that is at once very shallow and very little spiritual. When I see the unanimity, or all but unanimity, of a Church, advancing with its eyes closed, in the matter of military service and the acceptance of violence so long as it is commanded by the State, I am no longer able with a good conscience to admire the faith and the theological obedience of this Church. I can only say, ' Here is a Church which has not reflected about the problem, which is obeying the injunctions of the world, which is conformist and sociological, and which consequently is betraying its functions as a Church.' For it is important that in these functions also the Church should not act from habit but recover its prophetic role."

Granted that all this is true, and that the traditional case for the participation of Christians in war has gone by the board, what reason is there why the Amsterdam Assembly should not do what the memorialists ask ? There seem to remain three points of difficulty which the memorial makes no attempt to answer, and which the pacifist case as commonly presented does not meet. Our present purpose is not to debate the questions, but only to define them.

In the first place, the pacifist case is often argued on grounds of a perfectionist ethic and a view of the State and

of society which many Christians reject in principle. It is irrelevant to say, as in the memorial, that the Church can never be at war. War is an act in the political sphere. The question at issue is whether there are any circumstances in which it may be right for a *nation* to engage in war, and the discussion of *this* question is not advanced by reiteration of the high demands of membership of the heavenly city, which are not in dispute. Arguments about the incompatibility of war and perfect love are beside the point. It is an illusion to think that the perfect law of love is, or can be, fully practised in society as it is, even in time of peace—though it remains always relevant to every decision. Those who demand a complete renunciation of war have to show concretely why in a given situation it is the duty of the Christian to dissociate himself from the society of which he is a member, and, further, that he *can* do so.

This is the second point of difficulty. If the nature of *modern war* renders obsolete the traditional justification of Christian participation in war, the nature of *modern society*—as no one has seen more clearly than Mr. Middleton Murry—requires a new statement of the case for pacifism. This is what needs to be realized in the debate at Amsterdam. To go on repeating the old arguments is waste of breath. When war was waged by professional armies, a man, if his conscience forbade him, could refuse to be a soldier, just as he could refuse to enter other professions which he judged to be incompatible with his Christian calling. But in modern total war there is nothing that a man can do that does not in some way further the common war effort. The question which confronts the conscientious objector to war is how he can effectively oppose the decision of society without in effect leaving to others the dirtier and more dangerous tasks and living in relative ease at the price of their exertions.

Thirdly, the question which haunts and perplexes many who so hate war that they would sacrifice their own lives rather than perpetrate certain acts which war requires, is that in the present state of the world the public advocacy of disarmament or of the refusal of military service might in fact provoke the very catastrophe which it is aimed at averting. What, to come to tin tacks, do the memorialists

want the Assembly to do? To advocate unilateral disarmament? So it would seem from the statement that the Church should call upon peoples and governments, unitedly *or singly*, to cease from preparations for war. Unilateral disarmament is a political policy for which a case can be made. It may be the right policy. But it is not one which any of the principal nations would readily accept. A movement for unilateral disarmament, injected into the political arena and the confused welter of the struggle for power, might in the play of political forces have the unintended and undesired effect of bringing about the explosion. If it were recognized that *political* pacifism is just as much subject as any other political programme to the contingencies, uncertainties and relativism of all politics, it would be easier to come to grips with the actual problems. That is not a reason why a Christian should shrink from the responsibility of political action. But a realization of the uncertainties which attend all political action will save him from the arrogance of supposing that the Christian rectitude of his motives makes him immune from the danger of bringing upon the world through political misjudgment the very horrors against which his conscience revolts.

What attitude the Amsterdam Assembly ought to adopt in relation to war is a question which cannot be answered in advance of the meeting. It is by no means certain that even at the meeting the answer will become clear. There may be situations in history that are too confused and too deeply wrong to yield any solution that is entirely satisfying to the mind and conscience. In such situations we have patiently to wait, making sure that we keep open the lines of communication between different kinds of thinking and experience. The members of the different Churches at Amsterdam have to listen attentively to one another, and in listening to one another to listen attentively to God. We need to hear Him speaking to us in the hideous blasphemy of modern war. We must know the awful power of evil that holds our society in chains. Our minds have become so darkened and callous that we cannot see what is right. We need to be freed from the whole mentality by which we are at present enslaved. We must be willing to take the next

step when it becomes clear, and be content in the meantime to endure the tensions of the present darkness without losing faith or hope or love. There are times when the only thing to be done is to wait, and this can be an intensely positive attitude. In such times " the faith and the hope and the love are all in the waiting ".

**THE SUPPLEMENT**

The pamphlet which is the subject of this week's Supplement is one which will doubtless surprise our readers on the continent of Europe. In no country on the continent would it be possible to find seventy-seven Socialist members of Parliament who would sign a statement to the effect that they are Socialists because they are Christians. The pamphlet is a statement issued by the Parliamentary Socialist Christian Group comprising members of the Labour Party in both Houses of Parliament. The important thing to note is that this is not a statement written by one or two Christians who have then hawked it round for signatures. The group came into being first, and still persists.

There are, of course, members of other parties also for whom there is a clear connection between their Christian and their political faith. We called attention in a recent News-Letter to certain resolutions of the Liberal Party that were the result of consciously held Christian convictions,[1] and there have been a number of utterances by Conservative members of Parliament in the past year relating their political views to their Christian beliefs. But the explicitness of the Labour Party statement and the measure of support it has received give it exceptional interest as an attempt to relate Christianity and politics. Since what we want is debate we have invited Mr. Christopher Hollis, Conservative Member of Parliament for Devizes, to initiate a discussion. His Supplement will be followed by another, by a member of the Christian Socialist Group.

Dr. Alan

[1] C.N-L. No. 312, p. 7.

# "IN THIS FAITH WE LIVE" [1]

## A COMMENT BY CHRISTOPHER HOLLIS

SEVERAL of the authors of this pamphlet are persons whom I am very proud to number as my intimate friends. All are Christians of unquestionable sincerity. They express that degree of preference for their own opinions over the opposite which sincerity inevitably imposes, but they explicitly reject the temptation to make any exclusive Christian claims for their own political opinions and indeed rightly select tolerance as one of the essential marks of a Christian State. I therefore feel under no temptation at all to criticize their pamphlet from a party standpoint.

It is on two much larger issues that I would make some friendly comments.

### THE QUESTION OF THE CHURCH

First, one of the most certain, one of the least disputed, facts about Christ's career on earth was that He founded a Church. He did not found "the Churches" nor did He leave His Gospel to fructify only in the hearts of individual disciples. It is true that for two thousand years controversy has raged among the sincere and the pious concerning what was the nature of that Church and where exactly it is to be found to-day. I fully appreciate the practical problem of the authors of this pamphlet in that they differ profoundly among themselves in their answers to these questions and that this was by no means the place for the discussion of those differences. If they are to make a common statement at all, that statement could not be other than a highest common factor of their beliefs. It is not for me to say whether they could have found any common factor higher than they have found. Yet one cannot but note that the Church—in any definition of the word "Church"—plays no positive part at all in this pamphlet's statement of faith. The only statement that we have about it is a highly negative one. "While the Churches have a manifest obligation to

[1] Published by C. & J. Temple, Ltd., 7 Noel Street, W. 1. 6d.

proclaim the duty of their members to use Christian standards as their guide to political action, it would be wrong for the Churches to advocate detailed policies." This may be true enough as far as it goes and as far as it refers to matters upon which there is no explicit Christian teaching. But it does not go very far.

The great danger of the day—admitted both generally and by the authors of this pamphlet in particular—is the danger of totalitarianism. The appeal of totalitarianism is beyond question a psychological appeal. Man is a creature born to give loyalty to a society beyond himself. Deprive him of the society which God had appointed to receive that loyalty—of the Church—and he inevitably transfers his loyalty to the State. As the belief in the divinely founded Church declines, the belief in the totalitarian State increases. As the belief in the efficacy of the Sacraments declines, the belief in all the mumbo-jumbo of mass suggestion increases. Where the Church is to be found is another controversy with which neither the authors of this pamphlet nor I are at the moment concerned. But it is certainly the duty of every Christian to preach the doctrine of the Church in whatsoever form he or she may sincerely hold it.

## THE GOSPEL AND WEALTH

My second question to the authors of the pamphlet is this. They are admirably free from the cruder follies of materialism. They are very well aware that the problems of mankind will not be solved by merely increasing man's material possessions. "The function of a Christian policy" they truly write "is not primarily to secure the material welfare of individual citizens". Indeed they courageously and honourably recognize it as an evil of the times that a natural and proper desire for a reasonable standard of life is giving place to a jealous and selfish wish to prevent others from the enjoyment of any comfort which cannot be secured for oneself. Yet they have no doubt that the Christian should pursue this material welfare, if not as an end, at least as a means. "Get for each" they demand "the highest possible minimum of wealth, security against hardship" as a means to enable him to live the Christian life.

But is this really Christian teaching? It is an obvious physical truth that a certain material standard is necessary to enable a man to live a Christian life simply because a certain material standard is necessary to enable him to live at all. Had they demanded "the *lowest* possible minimum of wealth", the Christian could have had no quarrel with them. But surely it is the most manifest teaching of the New Testament that possessions and security, quite irrespective of whether other people have possessions and security or not, are in themselves extremely dangerous, that it is extremely bad luck on a person to be rich and extremely good luck on him to be poor. The Socialists may indeed be indignant at the hypocrisy of someone who is comfortably off, if he complacently preaches to the poor on the blessings of the acceptance of poverty. But we are not concerned with the moral shortcomings of the comfortable. We are concerned with Christian teaching. The Socialist wishes to make the poor rich. The Conservative, as it is alleged, and it is true enough of a certain type of Conservative, wishes to keep the rich rich. It is hard to say which idea is in more flat contradiction to the ideal of the Gospel. Nor is it at all necessary to discuss the point as a party point, for we can feel confident that, if one of the Apostles were to come back to earth, he would find comparatively small the gulf between the Conservative and the Socialist political programmes and enormous the gulf between both of them and the programme of the Gospel.

It is this absence of the suspicion of wealth which is to my mind the most notable omission from this interesting pamphlet. The Christian religion is of its essence an ascetical religion but there is no hint of that in the pamphlet. It is the curiosity of modern politics that the one thing upon which all politicians of all parties are agreed is that it is the object of policy to raise the material standards of the people. They differ only in the means by which they propose to accomplish the feat. But even on the most materialistic and hedonistic of planes no relationship is more doubtful than the relationship between riches and happiness. Nothing is more certainly false than the proposition that you automatically make people happier by making them richer. You

that is the one proposition upon which, it seems, all those who bid for the franchise of the electorate are agreed without distinction of party.

The danger of a debate whether Christians should be Socialists or Conservatives lies in the risk that the very debate will beg the question most at issue. It is not difficult to understand how a person can be a sincere Christian and also a Socialist nor how he can be a sincere Christian and also a Conservative. But what is much more doubtful is whether he can be a sincere Christian and believe in the party system in the exaggerated sense in which our present masters seek to impose it on us. It would certainly be both surprising and disedifying if Christians of all political parties did not sit somewhat more loosely to party discipline than the generality of politicians—and indeed I think that we can fairly claim, both of the authors of this pamphlet and of other Christian politicians of all parties, that on the whole they do so.

## SECURITY

More curious still is the claim that one of the "basic aims of Christian policy" is to give to people "security against hardship". Politicians often tell us not only that it is a good thing that people should be given social security but—what is far more astonishing—that they have been given social security simply because an Act of Parliament has been passed, which promises them social security. It is an example of the triumph of verbiage over experience surely unparalleled in human history. Every day's news tells us of threats of universal destruction, more dreadful than have ever before been known to man. Realists find in the Apocalypse alone adequate description of the catastrophes by which our race is threatened. Governments bid us turn our energies to the rebuilding of underground shelters and prepare ourselves against the day by life-like (or rather, death-like) exercises of atomic bombing. Yet by a trick of words, almost incomprehensible, there is thought to be no contradiction between these threats and the politicians' easy promise of social security. It requires a pen as ready and as cruel as that of Voltaire to paint the picture of our

children's generation, when the last surviving New Zealander, as he settles himself amid seven million corpses to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's, will murmur, " At least, thank God, we have social security."

It is our duty to strive that such things shall not be, but surely, when we are told that it is " a basic Christian aim " to provide " security against hardship ", we must reflect that nothing could be in more flagrant opposition to the promises which Christ held out to His disciples. It is true that He did not advocate insecurity ; He merely prophesied it. That was in fact the way in which the world would treat His disciples. But, after all, He made the world, and, if He had not thought that they were the better for being treated thus, He would not have made a world of such a sort. Indeed we have to face the truth, difficult as it may be, that all those qualities of foresight, provision for the future, and economic prudence, which statesmen think it the essence of wisdom to recommend to their electors, are qualities that are quite explicitly condemned in the Gospel—" Take no thought for the morrow "—and we are offered instead what may with reverence be called the Divine joke that he who least gives his mind to the provision of economic security is the most likely to attain it.

## THE POWER OF THE STATE

" Security against hardship " means in practice that the State shall take responsibility for relieving hardship, and, when the authors of the pamphlet claim that " the Labour party has a good claim to be considered the Christian party ", they mean, among other things, that it is a good thing to strengthen the power of the State. But is this so ? All power indeed corrupts and we are under no temptation to deny that those private persons who held power under previous dispensations often abused it. But government by the State is after all merely government by the statesmen. He must be naive indeed who believes that there is any special privilege which exempts statesmen from the normal operations of original sin. There is no automatic guarantee that things will be done in the public interest simply because they are done by the State. On the contrary, if we take the

modern world all over, it is obvious that the amount of tyranny and injustice and suffering that has been imposed in the name of private interest is trivial and almost negligible in comparison with the amount of tyranny and injustice and suffering that has been imposed, in one country or another, by States. He would be optimistic indeed who saw in the survival of certain nominally democratic practices any guarantee against the growth of tyranny in this country. On the contrary all the probabilities and all the evidence coincide to indicate that the State, like other institutions in this country, and like other States in other countries, as it becomes more powerful will become simultaneously more corrupt. "The morality of a society," writes Professor Jung, "as a whole is in inverse ratio to its size. . . . Every man is unconsciously a worse man, in a certain sense, when he is in society than when acting alone; he is carried by the group and to that extent is relieved of his individual responsibility. A large company that is made up of entirely admirable people resembles, in respect to its morality and intelligence, an unwieldy, stupid and violent animal. Hence the larger the organization, the more are its immorality and blind stupidity inevitable. *Senatus bestia, senatores boni viri.*"

It would be unfair to the authors of the pamphlet to pretend that they were not widely alive to the dangers of the situation. On the contrary, they bravely write, "Those who grumble at present shortages must be persuaded to realize that our system of government, with its ancient liberties and the opportunities it gives for self-expression, is in danger of eclipse and even of extinction." But the implications would seem to be that, during a temporary emergency, every good citizen must be content to take his disciplined place in the queue. There is little to give us a hint that a society in which everyone could satisfy his every need might be itself an evil and empty society.

"All our doings," says the pamphlet, "should be inspired by the sense of divine vocation." It is a fine and important sentence. Any system, whether it be socialist or capitalist, Labour or Conservative, which does not offer to every man and woman an opportunity of living a vocational life is to

that extent to be condemned. By that test we rightly condemn the capitalism of the past, when we reflect how large a proportion of the goods which people consumed were spiritually useless and by consequence how large a proportion of society's labour was occupied in the production of useless goods and how large a proportion even of useful goods were produced under conditions in which the workers could not feel any share of vocational responsibility for what they produced. The most serious criticism of modern British Socialism is not that it overturns the habits of capitalism but that, in this respect at any rate, it continues them. As Peter Drucker has put it, socialism is "the Siamese twin" of capitalism.

There are welcome signs among the authors of this pamphlet, as elsewhere within the Socialist ranks, that there is an awakening to the need for a real revolution—a regeneration of society in the spiritual sense—as opposed to the mechanical shift of label from Tweedledum to Tweedledee of the Marxians and the professional "Leftists". But that demand is bound to remain ineffective unless Christianity is explicitly preached both as an ascetical religion and as a religion where ultimate reality is to be found not within the Utopias of this world but in the future life for which our strivings here are of necessity but a preparation.

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